Expectation states theory

Gilder, Theodorus Christophorus de

SUMMARY

This dissertation reports the results of a research project concerning expectation states theory (EST; Berger, Conner & Fisek, 1974; Berger, Fisek, Norman & Zelditch, 1977; Berger, Rosenholtz & Zelditch, 1980; Berger, Wagner & Zelditch, 1985; Berger, Webster, Ridgeway, & Rosenholtz, 1986). EST provides an explanation for the emergence of influence differentials in small groups. After an introductory chapter consisting of a short review of EST literature and the discussions it evoked, three studies are reported describing six experiments that were performed as part of the project. Although each of these studies had its own specific purpose and hypotheses, the findings displayed a number of agreements across experiments that called for further discussion. For this reason, a final, general discussion is presented in the fifth and last chapter.

Thus, the first chapter involves EST itself. In this chapter first the theoretical starting-points of EST are described. EST states that influence differentials come about because group members develop expectations about the relative competence of each group member. Moreover, it is assumed that each group member will behave in accordance with their (performance) expectations. The larger the, estimated, difference in relative competence, the larger EST expects the influence differentials to be. Influence differentials are mostly expressed in the degree to which someone *is* influenced by another person, which is either called influence acceptance or rejection of influence. According to EST people do not base their expectations regarding their relative competence solely on factual or objective information about their competencies, but also on a number of characteristics (such as sex, race, and occupational status) that are associated with status, power and prestige in the larger society. For this reason, these characteristics are called *status characteristics*.

In the many investigations with regard to EST two major research interests may be indicated. First, a number of studies were performed in order to establish whether or not certain characteristics may function as status characteristics. In this field of research it was found that a large number of apparently irrelevant characteristics did establish influence differentials. Besides characteristic such as sex and race, which are often associated with status, characteristics such as ethnicity, physical attractiveness, military rank, occupational status, age, and educational status also appeared to affect influence differentials. EST's second major research interest pertains to the question how people process information about their status position on more than one status characteristic. EST's stance in this "combining - balancing" issue is that people will combine separate pieces of status information. Combining results in an aggregated "expectation state," which in its turn determines influence differentials. People are said to be "balancing" status information when the participants take only one piece of status information into account, hence, when they make a selection from all available status information. It is assumed that balancing occurs out of self-presentational motivations, suggesting that people only employ

status information reflecting their own status superiority. However, in EST predominantly support for the "combining hypothesis" has been found.

Both EST's basic premises and the way EST was investigated in hav criticized. It seems to be meaningful to distinguish two subjects of criticism. of these refers to the basic role performance expectations play in EST. Ofshe (1981) and, for instance, Knottnerus (1988) question the importan attributes to these performance expectations, that is, being the sole determ influence differentials.

A second criticism concerns the way status differentials emerge. EST assur this emergence occurs in a cooperative way: each group member is believed to that the best group's performance will be achieved when everybody tries to each others' competence as correctly as possible. Moreover, it is assum everyone will pursue making correct competence appraisals and will att behave in accordance with them (i.e. by accepting more influence as they their fellow group members to be more competent). Mazur (1985) states that the time status differentials do emerge in a cooperative fashion, but that often based on dominant behavior or a competition for status as well. Mazur that status competitions predominantly occur when people's relative status are unclear.

In the research project six experiments were performed. In doing so attempted both to do justice to EST and to take into account the criticism The six experiments were all performed in the same experimental settin participants in the experiments (subjects) were each in a separate cubicle e with a response terminal. It was suggested that they would cooperate with on other participants (who was referred to as their partner). They were confron a highly ambiguous task, on which bogus performance feedback was provide feedback about their relative competence constituted the (often employed manipulation. By showing responses on subjects' monitors that, seemingly from their partner, diverged from the subjects' own responses, and by offeri an opportunity to change their answers, their degree of influence acceptance measured. In one study also subjects' influence exertion was assessed (cha For this measure it was counted how often subjects gave an answer first, wh themselves could determine whether they gave an answer first or second.

In chapter 2 two experiments are reported that address the issue performance expectations are the only or even the most important determ influence differentials. In this chapter first a number of studies are discusse suggest that individuals are reluctant to accept influence from their fello members, even in task-oriented, cooperative groups. It is argued that a influence, giving up one's own opinion, can be considered as an "ego cost." M it is stated that these costs will only be endured when there is some indica accepting influence will be rewarding, that is, when the ego costs are compen by rewards. The validity of this reasoning was investigated in two experiment

In the first experiment this occurred by comparing conditions in which subjects had incomplete information about their relative competence and conditions in which subjects did have complete status information. As it is uncertain that influence acceptance will be rewarding when people have incomplete information about their competencies, it was predicted that influence acceptance would be lower in these conditions as compared to conditions in which subjects had equal status. This prediction was confirmed. The most interesting result of this study was that when subjects' own status position was unknown, they behaved in the same way as subjects who had high status, whereas when their partner's status position was unknown, they behaved as if their partner had a low status position.

The second experiment of this study was performed in order to underpin the "ego costs compensation" hypothesis. In this experiment it was investigated to what degree certain structural properties of the situation, which should affect the degree of influence acceptance according to the "ego costs compensation" hypothesis, really did so. The participants were confronted with a situation in which a) they either had to give a preliminary answer before their "real, definitive answer," or not, b) they either had the prospect of getting rewards for giving correct answers or not, and c) the ego costs that were associated with accepting influence were described as either high or low. The results were in agreement with the "ego costs compensation" hypothesis, since influence acceptance was rather low in general, but particularly when subjects had committed themselves to their preliminary answer while no rewards had been mentioned. Influence acceptance was also lower when accepting influence was associated with high ego costs rather than with low ego costs.

In chapter 3 an experiment is reported that pertains to the "combining - balancing" issue. In this experiment it was investigated how subjects' behavior changed as a consequence of the repeated provision of information about their relative competence. Subjects made three tasks. In each one of them influence acceptance was measured. In the first task subjects did not have any information about their competence. In the second task they knew that their performance was either better or worse than their partners' performance. Then they received a second piece of status information, which was either consistent or inconsistent with the first. Hence, in the third task subjects knew that they had performed better in both former tasks, worse in both tasks, or better in one, and worse in the other task.

There were several notable results. For instance, it appeared that subjects' influence acceptance in the first task (in which subjects had no status information) was an important predictor of their degree of influence acceptance in the later tasks. This result shows that subjects behaved in a rather consistent way. It does not imply, however, that information indicating subjects had higher competence had the same effect as information indicating they had lower competence. After the provision of status information subjects who had low competence did not start to accept more influence, whereas subjects who appeared to have higher competence clearly did accept less influence than in the first task. Another interesting result was that

subjects who had received consistent (in fact, even identical) status information, started to accept more influence (low status subjects) or less influence (high status subjects) relative to in the foregoing tests.

In chapter 4 three experiments are reported. This study had two objectives, while the assessment of *influence exertion* was central. EST states that expectation differentials do not only determine influence acceptance, but other types of status-related behaviors, such as influence exertion, as well. Moreover, it is hypothesized that these types of behavior are strongly correlated. In each of the three experiments both influence acceptance and influence exertion were measured, while the relation between these variables was calculated as well. The most notable result with regard to this correlation was that it was low to moderate in each of the three experiments.

A second objective of the study was to determine effects of size and stability of status difference on both dependent variables. For these factors some interesting results were found as well. First, the status effect appeared to be independent of the size of the status differentials. Thus, effects of small and large status differences were of equal strength. Secondly, stability of the status differentials (it was suggested that subjects' status position was either likely to change or unlikely to change) affected influence acceptance and influence exertion differently. For influence acceptance it was found, as expected, that the difference between the high and low status conditions was smaller under unstable conditions than in stable situations. For influence exertion subjects who had an unstable status position tried to exert more influence than subjects who had a stable positon.

The fact that influence acceptance and influence exertion had a different meaning for subjects appears both from the low correlation between the measures, as from the differential effect of stability on both measures. In the discussion on this issue, this difference in meaning is retraced to a motivational difference: although subjects usually are cooperatively oriented, they may have regarded influence exertion as a means to acquire status.

In the final discussion (chapter 5) the implications of our findings for EST are examined. Central in this discussion is the observtion that a number of findings are not in agreement with EST's premise that performance expectations determine influence differentials. The results clearly indicate that other factors are important as well, in particular people's inclination to accept influence, and the importance people attach to performance expectations. Nevertheless, it may be argued that these results supplement EST rather than invalidating it.

The latter conclusion does not apply to the results referring to the motives underlying people's influence behavior. While EST assumes that people are motivated to develop expectation states that are correct, in order to achieve favorable group outcomes, the findings in this dissertation seem to indicate that even people who have a cooperative task-orientation have several motives to exert or to accept influence. The reluctance to accept influence, as attempting to attain a higher status

position may be considered as examples of such motives. In addition, it seems that such motives are particularly involved when there is uncertainty about people's status position, that is, when it is possible that status positions will change. With this the findings contribute to the (predominantly) theoretical discussions about the validity of EST that have been held in recent years.